

Remarks of Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs
Hearing on: “Climate Change and the Arctic: New Frontiers of National Security”
March 25, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My Congressional District in South Florida is vulnerable to hurricanes and tornadoes.

As a result, I have paid attention to reports that the increasing intensity and frequency of natural disasters including tornadoes, tropical storms, and hurricanes are linked to a change in our global climate.

There is further documentation noting that a change in our Earth’s temperature is currently affecting some of South Florida’s most precious natural habitats, such as our coral reefs.

Several marine scientists have indicated that coral bleaching could be caused by changing atmospheric temperatures.

This poses both a serious environmental and financial concern—as our precious marine ecosystems and pristine beaches are major sources of economic revenue for our South Florida economy.

For that reason, I have taken several proactive steps to increase awareness of this issue in the Congress, including forming the bipartisan National Marine Sanctuary Caucus.

But there is much more work to be done to better understand what has been termed as: “Global Climate Change.”

Other countries are taking action to extend their control in the Arctic.

Plans are being made to greatly increase the exploration and exploitation of natural resources.

But our overall knowledge of the problem and its many components are still very limited.

Extrapolating trends based on limited data is always a risky business.

It is risky to act without adequate information and mistaking possibilities for inevitabilities.

A case in point is the National Intelligence Assessment on Global Climate Change released last year by the CIA.

It has received considerable publicity and continues to be cited as proof of the need for urgent action and advance a specific political agenda.

But too little mention has been made of its vague and tentative conclusions and its admitted lack of evidence.

The NIA's authors openly admit that the factual basis and models they used were inadequate to the task they faced.

Let me read some of the caveats Dr. Thomas Fingar, the Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis, and Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, included in his testimony last June at the Joint hearing by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming:

- “assessing the future of a society's evolution will by necessity be a scenario-driven exercise and an imprecise science.”
- “From an intelligence perspective, the present level of scientific understanding of future climate change lacks the resolution and specificity we would like for detailed analysis at the state level.”
- “Our analysis could be greatly improved if we had a much better understanding and explanation of past and current human behavior.”

Mr Chairman, we should take a sober approach resting on a solid body of evidence.

The Directive on the Arctic issued on January 9th of this year offered such an approach.

It laid down a comprehensive set of guidelines for U.S. policy in the region, covering international scientific cooperation; maritime, economic, and energy issues; environmental protection; and boundary disputes, among others.

With this Directive, U.S. national security interests in the region were defined; our determination to defend them made clear to the world; and our future course mapped.

But this is just a starting point.

We have a responsibility to continue to identify current and long-range potential challenges and opportunities in the Arctic and take on the hard work of developing real-world options to address these.

To that end, I look forward to the testimony of our witnesses today.